

CHANUKAH VS. PURIM

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Today's Learning:

Shabbat 2:3-4

Orach Chaim 205:1-3

Daf Yomi (Bavli): Yevamot 11

Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Ketubot 45

Today, the last day of Chanukah is known as "Zot Chanukah." This name is taken from one of the verses in the Torah reading for the eighth day of Chanukah (Bemidbar 7:84), "Zot chanukat ha'mizbeach . . ."/"This was the dedication of the altar . . ." R' Zvi Elimelech of Dinov z"l (died 1841) elaborates on the significance of that name and of the day:

The Torah reading for the eighth day of Chanukah (the maftir, when it falls on Shabbat) begins with the sacrifice brought by the prince of the tribe of Menashe. The twelve tribes correspond to the twelve months, and the month that corresponds to Menashe is Cheshvan. (This is true when one counts Nissan as the first month and counts the tribes in the order that they traveled in the desert and also brought their sacrifices, as related in the Torah reading for Chanukah.)

Cheshvan is the month when, according to tradition, the Bet Hamikdash will be rebuilt. (The first Bet Hamikdash was dedicated in Tishrei, which corresponds to Ephraim, while the second Bet Hamikdash was rededicated in Kislev, which corresponds to Binyamin. Thus, all three Temples were or will be dedicated in months that are connected with the children of Rachel, the "Akkeret Ha'bayit"/"Mistress of the House" [i.e., the Temple].)

On the eighth day of Chanukah, when we read about the sacrifice of Menashe's descendant, we allow ourselves to look forward to the future redemption, which also is connected with Menashe, as explained above. We say, "This is the dedication" - Let us soon see the Temple's final dedication. (Bnei Yissaschar)

"And Pharaoh said to Yosef, 'I dreamt a dream, but no one can interpret it. Now I heard it said of you that you comprehend a dream to interpret it.'

"Vaya'an Yosef/Yosef answered Pharaoh, saying, 'That is beyond me; it is G-d Who will respond with Pharaoh's welfare.'

"Then Pharaoh said to Yosef, 'In my dream, behold! . . .'" (41:15-17)

How did Yosef dare to interrupt Pharaoh? asks R' Moshe Yechiel Epstein (the "Ozorofer Rebbe"; died 1971). From here we see Yosef's great humility, he answers. Yosef could not bear, even for a moment, even under these circumstances, to have attributed to him a talent or ability which he did not possess. (Be'er Moshe, p. 778)

"Then Reuven said to his father, 'You may slay my two sons if I fail to bring him [Binyamin] back to you.'" (42:37)

Rashi writes: Yaakov did not accept Reuven's proposal because he said, "This is a fool who proposes that I kill his sons. Are they not also my sons?"

Yet, when Yehuda later proposed (43:9), "I will personally guarantee him; from my own hand you can demand him; if I do not bring him back to you and stand him before you, then I will have sinned to you for all time," Yaakov agreed. Why didn't Yaakov respond, "Are you not my son? I do not want you to lose your share in the World-to-Come!" [This was Yehuda's proposal - that he would not find eternal rest if he did not bring Binyamin back.]

R' Baruch Sorotzkin z"l (1917-1979; Rosh Yeshiva of the Telshe Yeshiva) explains: Yehuda laid everything he had on the line. He was sure that, with G-d's help, he would return Binyamin to their father. Reuven did not demonstrate that level of trust in Hashem. Reuven had four sons; thus, when he offered only two of his sons as a guarantee, it appeared that he was not sure he would succeed in his mission.

R' Sorotzkin continues: Bitachon/trust-in-Hashem is the absolutely indispensable prerequisite to success in serving Hashem. The classic work Chovot Halevavot teaches that one cannot serve Hashem if one does not have peace of mind, and one cannot have peace of mind if he lacks bitachon, the belief that no one can harm you in any way unless that is the will of Hashem. (Ha'binah Ve'ha'berachah p. 95)

Chanukah vs. Purim

Why is Chanukah celebrated less festively than Purim? R' Azaryah Figo z"l (Italy; 1579-1647) offers four answers:

(1) The more people that a miracle benefits, the greater should be its commemoration.

Achashveirosh reigned from one end of the known world to the other. Thus, virtually all Jews lived within his realm and were subject to Haman's conspiracy. For this reason, too, the Purim miracle was the salvation of all of the Jews.

On the other hand, a relatively small part of the world's Jewish population lived in Antiochus' realm. Thus, the miracle of Chanukah, as great as it was, was less significant for the survival of the Jewish people.

(2) Antiochus' oppression of the Jews took place (a) in Eretz Yisrael and (b) at a time when the Bet Hamikdash stood. The merit of the Land and the merit of the Temple undoubtedly assisted the Jewish people in being saved. Thus, the Chanukah miracle is less surprising and wondrous than the Purim miracle, which took place in Persia. Indeed, the Purim miracle is significant because it represents the fulfillment of a Biblical verse (Vayikra 26:44), "But despite all this, when they will be in the land of their enemies, I will not have been revolted by them nor will I have rejected them to obliterate them, to annul My covenant with them - for I am Hashem, their G-d."

(3) Antiochus' decrees were against the spirituality of the Jewish people. They were, in reality, decrees against Hashem Himself. Obviously, then, Hashem had to (so-to-speak) defend Himself. The Chanukah miracle therefore was not surprising and was not per se a kindness to us.

Haman's decree, on the other hand, was directed against the Jewish people, not their religion. The kindness that Hashem showed by saving us was therefore greater.

(4) The Chanukah miracle came about when one group of people - the Macabees - defeated the plans of a different person - Antiochus. This is certainly worth celebrating. The Purim miracle, however, involved a person - Achashveirosh, who hated the Jews as much as Haman did - acting against his own wishes (when he agreed to Esther's request to save the Jews). This is an unusual miracle indeed, for one of the fundamental axioms on which our world operates is man's free will. (Binah La'ittim: Drush Sheni Le'Chanukah)

Letters from Our Sages

The letter which follows was written by R' Simcha Zissel Ziv z"l (the "Alter" of Kelm; died 1898), possibly to his son. It is found in Ohr Rashaz, no. 169.

I enjoyed your letter . . .

Behold, "It is befitting that wise men acknowledge the truth." The reason is that once something has become clear to a wise man as if it stands before him alive, it is impossible for the wise man not to acknowledge the truth, even if it otherwise would be against his nature to admit that thing.

Who do we have who was more wicked than Pharaoh! Yet, when he heard Yosef's interpretation, he was very moved by Yosef's wisdom and he said (41:39-40), "Since G-d has informed you of all this, there can be no one so discerning and wise as you. You shall be in charge of my palace and by your command shall my people be sustained . . ." And so it was; whatever Yosef wanted to do he did, just as a person does with his own property. Thus, it says (41:55), "When all the land of Egypt hungered, the people cried out to Pharaoh for bread. So Pharaoh said to all of Egypt, 'Go to Yosef, whatever he tells you, you should do'." Rashi explains that Yosef had instructed the people to circumcise themselves, all of Egypt, and Pharaoh did not overrule Yosef. To the contrary, he commanded them that they must accept Yosef's decree, for it cannot be annulled.

Look to what extent wise men acknowledge the truth. Pharaoh was a very wise man; this I learned in the Ramban. . . We see later, when Yosef revealed himself to his brothers, he said to them (45:9), "He [G-d] has made me father to Pharaoh, master of his entire household." . . . Pharaoh was a very wise man and understood a lot from a little bit, i.e., he recognized Yosef's great wisdom and that he [Pharaoh] was insignificant compared to Yosef's wisdom. He saw that Yosef was fit to be king, not he, and it is the nature of wise men to acknowledge the truth, even if it otherwise would be against their nature to admit that thing. . .

Look at the strength of a wise man. He can acknowledge the truth and he was not hindered by the lashon hara of the butler [who called Yosef] (41:12), "A Hebrew youth, a slave." Even though Yosef was a paroled prisoner and even though it was against the laws of Egypt [to appoint a slave to high office], Pharaoh made no investigation as to why Yosef was in prison. He understood that Yosef was his "father" in wisdom and deserved to rule.

Sponsored by the Vogel family on the yahrzeit of Miriam bat Yehuda Laib a"h (Mary Kalkstein)

The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ("lehagdil Torah u'leha'adirah"), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at [Project Genesis](#) start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page. Text archives from 1990 through the present may be retrieved from <http://www.acoast.com/~sehc/hamaayan/>. Donations to HaMaayan are tax-deductible.
